



# LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

*Celebrating 26 Years of Advocacy & Achievement*

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March 23, 2011

To: Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich, Mayor  
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From: Patricia Curry, Chair   
Los Angeles County Commission for Children and Families

## RE: THE NEED TO EVALUATE FAMILY PRESERVATION PROGRAMS

We are writing to you recommending that the Chief Executive Office (CEO) and the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) evaluate the outcomes for Family Preservation (FP) contracts and services.

The Commission for Children and Families at recent meetings had the following two presentations by DCFS and their community partners:

- A two-year evaluation report of the Prevention Initiative Demonstration Project (PIDP)
- An update and report on FP services

What was striking in the two presentations was the contrast between the independent evaluation with very positive outcomes for children resulting from the PIDP services and the lack of any evaluation or outcomes study on the FP contracts. Despite the millions of dollars spent on FP over the years, there have only been two formal evaluations of this program since FP began in 1992. One evaluation was conducted in 2000 and the other in 2005. After the 2000 evaluation conducted by Dr. Barbara Solomon, the Commission with the concurrence of DCFS, recommended to your Board that there was a need for an ongoing evaluation to ensure the effectiveness of the program. The then Director of DCFS assured your Board and the Commission that quarterly evaluative reports would be implemented. However, no formal evaluations have been conducted since 2005.

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There is the need for an independent evaluation to address a number of issues, such as the following:

- Determine whether FP is making a difference in the lives of the children and families receiving services. It is also important to know whether the services provided show a decrease in the “re-entry” rates into child welfare of families that have participated in FP and received services.
- Determine whether families receiving FP services experience a higher rate of “permanency exits” than those families who do not receive FP services.
- Determine the cost effectiveness of the program based on the outcomes of the FP program.
- Compare the outcomes and cost effectiveness of PIDP and FP in order to determine what future funding should be invested in each program. It was reported to the Commission that \$37 million is spent annually on FP of which \$11million is from the Title IV-E Waiver reinvestment dollars (an increase from Fiscal Year 2009/10). PIDP on the other hand is funded at a fraction of this amount.
- Determine if FP programs are coordinated with services and programs of other County Departments such as Health Services, Mental Health, and Public Health.
- Determine which FP agencies are having successful outcomes and which are not.
- Determine whether modifications should be made to the existing contracts.

The Commission has had a long history of involvement in FP beginning two decades ago when the legendary child advocate, Nancy Daly, traveled to Washington, D.C. to ensure the passage of FP legislation, and that Los Angeles County would lead way in the use of these dollars. The Commission, under Commissioner Daly’s recommendation, worked closely with DCFS in implementing these programs. The Commission strongly believes that without an evaluation process, we will not know what programs are effective and whether these programs continue to work under the Guiding Principles that include Child Health and Safety, Strong Families, and Strong Communities.

The Commission respectfully requests that your Honorable Board consider the following recommendations:

1. The CEO and DCFS ensure that there is an independent evaluation of the FP programs, services, and contracts, before the end of 2011, and prior to renewing the existing contracts.
2. The CEO and DCFS ensure that FP Networks develop and leverage partnerships in the communities they serve to increase effectiveness.
3. The CEO and DCFS develop evidence-based standards and outcome data that should be utilized to provide consistent evaluation standards and time frames for all contracts. There should not be a discrepancy in the evaluation process as it currently exists of requiring a comprehensive evaluation for some contracts, and little or no evaluation, for other contracts.
4. DCFS review the “re-entry” rate and the rate of “permanency exits” of both PIDP and FP programs.
5. Funding for programs be based on outcomes and effectiveness of the programs and services.
6. An evaluation should determine whether the upfront assessments are cost effective and efficient, and are not duplicative of other assessments.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

PC:AS:ma

c: Chief Executive Officer  
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors  
Acting Director, Department of Children and Family Services  
Director, Department of Health Services  
Director, Department of Mental Health  
Director, Department of Public Health,  
Director, Department of Public Social Services  
County Counsel  
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